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THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

SERVING METROPOLITAN KANSAS CITY

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From the April 4, 2003 print edition

North Kansas City is building future on fiber optics

Charlie Anderson Staff Writer

Between warehouses and dusty parking lots, street crews are laying the groundwork for North Kansas City's future.

Flush with casino revenues, the city is constructing a fiber-optic ring that will connect all city buildings. Upon that base, project planners hope, the city one day will offer high-speed Internet access as a public utility.

Such high-tech services could draw businesses and residents to the fairly self-contained city, making it a trendsetter by metro-area standards.

Bob Jewell, senior vice president of Lenexa-based Network Integration Services Inc. and the project's architect, has even grander visions.

Police cars soon will be equipped with laptop computers that patch into a high-speed wireless network managed by the city. Video cameras throughout the city will connect to the network, transmitting a digital record of a day's worth of crime. Schematics of city buildings will be stored in a database, retrieved by the Fire Department on its way to battling a blaze.

"What you'll have is a more secure city," Jewell said.

For beginners, the city will install one camera near its water tower, which had been broken into earlier in the year.

Price is right

And it's all at bargain-basement prices. To construct two networks that link the city's 11 buildings, the city will pay about \$750,000. That's half the cost of the original plan that NIS proposed and far less than what it would have cost during the boom days of tech and telecom.

Jewell estimated that the price for the project five years ago would have been anywhere from \$10 million to \$20 million.

"It's such a buyer's market," said Dan Lindle, the city's network administrator and lone technology

employee, who will be in charge of running the network once it's up. "A year ago, it would have cost three to four times as much."

But before Lindle and Jewell can realize their grand vision of North Kansas City becoming its own telecommunications outfit, the state of Missouri must clear the way.

State legislation drafted after the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 barred government outfits in Missouri from essentially becoming their own telecom provider.

SBC Communications Inc., Missouri's largest phone company, lobbied hard to get the restriction in place because a city providing high-speed Internet access would cut into its DSL revenues.

"While we respect a city's decision to be in the phone business, (it) is fraught with conflict of interest and anti-competitive behavior," SBC spokeswoman Emily MacDonald said. "They should not be able to compete with companies that they regulate."

North Kansas City collected \$1.9 million in 2002 from utility companies it charges franchise fees, which grant public rights of way.

In 2002, Missouri opened the door, allowing cities to operate their own cable outfits, which entail telecom services, such as Internet access. But the issue still is not fully resolved.

Lindle is keeping a close watch on federal court battles that could reach a climax with the U.S. Supreme Court deciding whether states can bar municipalities from offering telecom services.

In 43 states, municipalities are allowed to offer telecom services as a utility to residents. For example, New Smyrna Beach, Fla., sells unlimited local and long-distance telephone service to residents for \$49 a month. Memphis is set to begin selling wholesale Internet connections to businesses this year.

To Jewell, North Kansas City represents a perfect environment for the service. With about 4,700 residents in two square miles, the city is self-contained and manageable.

About a quarter of the homes are being rebuilt as part of the \$91 million Northgate Village redevelopment. The rebuilding would lend to a coincided effort to construct an Internet network to the homes.

And the city, on the back of \$11 million in annual gaming revenue, has the money for large-scale projects, including \$30 million in the bank.

"You think about it being a dowdy little place," Jewell said. "But people in North Kansas City are treated very well."

City of progress

Outwardly, city leaders aren't talking about the grander idea of becoming a service provider.

That's because the city walks a fine line between updating its own technology and miffing the utility companies whose market it would cut into on broadband.

The city's economic development director, Jeff Samborski, won't broach the subject, even though city-

provided broadband could lure businesses to the area.

"We're just trying to get the infrastructure in place," Samborski said.

Jewell wants more than just infrastructure. He wants to put in wireless "hot spots," which would allow city employees and, eventually, residents to surf the Internet while on the go.

However, the Wi-Fi technology behind it is still a bit raw, with questions about security and interference.

The city also will consider getting rid of its telephone system in favor of Internet Protocol (IP) Telephony, which uses the Internet network to route phone calls.

For Lindle, it's a tough sell: He describes the city as a retirement community that hasn't always seen a need for high-tech services. But then he looks at the city logo he's greeted with each morning when he arrives: "North Kansas City: Tradition of Progress."



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Gladstone Sun-News

North Kansas City Council continues network bid process

By: Kellie Houx, Assistant Editor

February 27, 2003

The North Kansas City Council listened to Network Integration Services owner Robert Jewell describe fiber optics installation for the city.

After receiving three bids, K&W Underground offered to bury the fiber optic lines except over the levy near North Kansas City Hospital.

He told the city the cost is less than he anticipated in June when the council first explored this upgrade.

Jewell anticipated linking the city hall complex with outlying buildings including animal control, Fire Station 2 and possibly North Kansas City Hospital could cost between \$1,388,000 and \$2.7 million. Now he estimates the city could be networked together for less than \$730,000.

Councilman John Makuch asked Jewell to bring back figures broken out for connecting the city hall complex, Fire Station 1 and the community center.

Components for either plan will include permits to dig under the railroad tracks, a contingency fund, network design, fiber installation and program management.

The council already approved the purchase of servers.

Another \$252,000 could upgrade the phone systems, surveillance, wireless access and a contingency fund.

Councilwoman Bettie Miller said she is pleased to see a company that is willing to bury the lines.

"I am still concerned about the poles needed for the hospital," she said.

Jewell told her the hospital could be self-contained and manage its own systems if a storm takes down the lines.

"We are trying to find areas that have no trees to place these poles," he said. "The big thing is not ice, but probably someone sliding his car into them and knocking out service."

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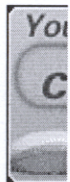
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Miller asked how deep the lines will be buried. Jewell said the minimum is 3 feet. The railroad companies suggest a depth of 10 feet.


Jewell reminded the City Council that House bill 1402 allows a city to lease fiber optic cable lines which could generate revenue.

He suggested the city purchase 144 lines rather than 48, which is the usual number of network lines for a city of North Kansas City's size.

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